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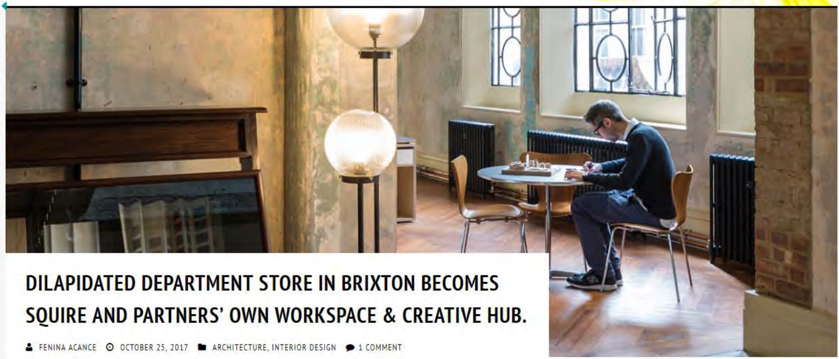
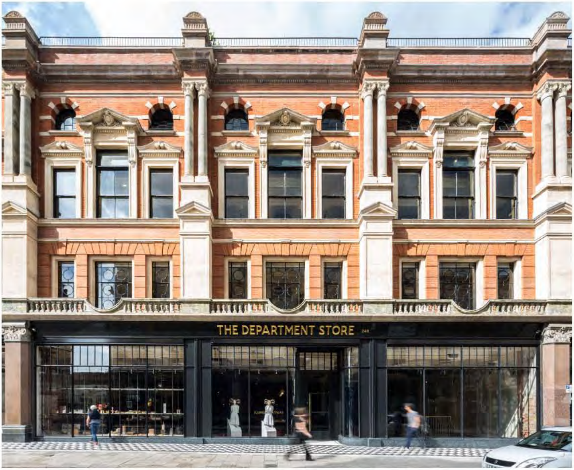


DILAPIDATED DEPARTMENT STORE IN BRIXTON BECOMES SQUIRE AND PARTNERS' OWN WORKSPACE & CREATIVE HUB.

FENINA ACANCE   OCTOBER 25, 2017   ARCHITECTURE, INTERIOR DESIGN   1 COMMENT



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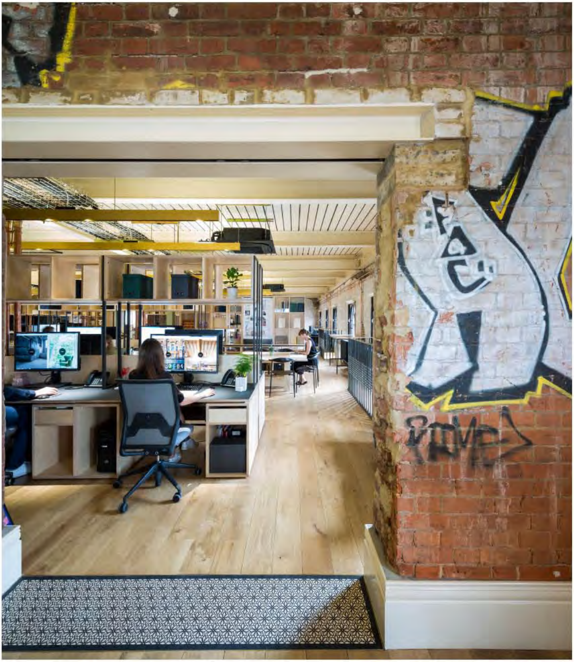
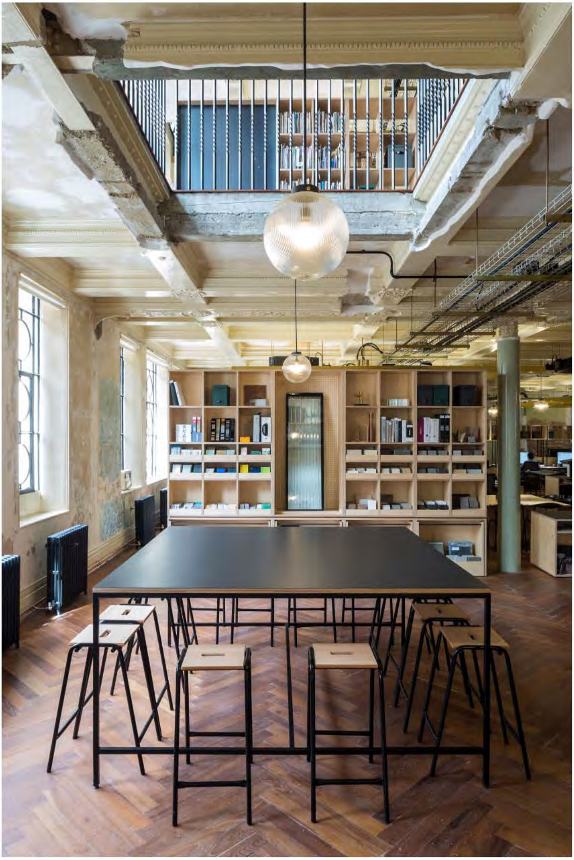
Stop the presses (or whatever the online equivalent is) because we've just discovered one insanely cool **office space**. The Department Store is the headquarters of **London** based architecture practice, **Squire and Partners**. As the name suggests, this Edwardian building was once a department store that opened 1906 but has remained empty and decaying since 2012. After out-growing their Kings Cross premises, the 250-strong practice bought the Brixton building and entirely transformed it while still retaining many of its original features. With a backdrop of exposed **brick**, **graffiti**-laced walls and original parquetry flooring, this office reveals layers of history that is much more impressive than the glossy, new and oftentimes sterile **workplaces** that have become the corporate norm.

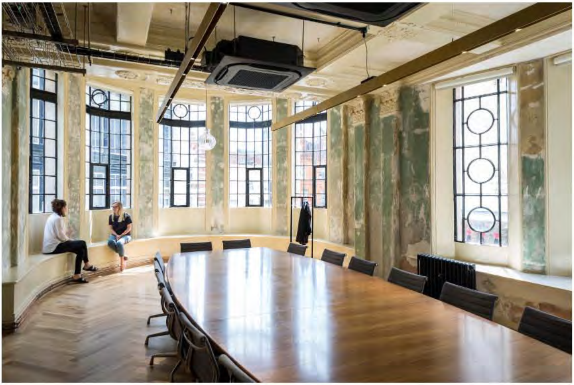
Squire and Partners are no strangers to adaptive reuse and they spent over two years reworking and reimagining the dilapidated Edwardian gem. First impressions in 2014 were less than complimentary as they were faced with a cavernous four-storey monstrosity with false ceilings and badly built annexes. *"The conversation quickly changed to 'Isn't this amazing?' But the problem was, we knew it would cost an absolute fortune to fully restore it,"* says senior partner Michael Squire. *"Then we thought about the bars and restaurants that were moving into similarly incredible but incredibly worn-down buildings in East Berlin. They would, very cleverly and efficiently, leave layers of that wear and tear exposed and renovate around it."* And that's exactly what they did. They stripped the building back to its raw yet grand bones of **marble**, terracotta, Crittall windows, brickwork and parquet floors, and used them as a driver of design.

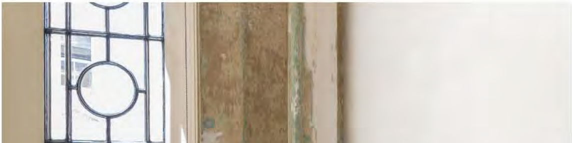


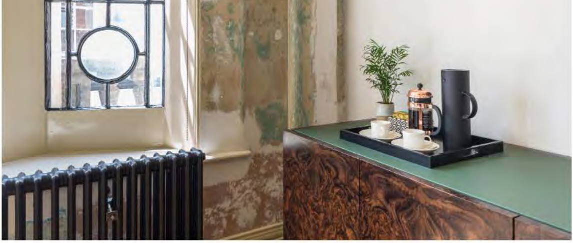


The historical character of the building is amplified by the sheer size of the development. With over 6,000 square meters to play around with, every last detail is well considered, refined yet not over-designed. Conceived as a **cultural** hub, the building comprises of a design studio with multiple breakout areas, meeting rooms exhibition spaces, a model-making workshop as well as public facilities such as a **cafe**, **bar**, roof terrace and record shop. The Department Store is intended to exhibit the different facets of the architectural practice including **installations**, **interior design**, **product design**, **illustration**, model making and CGI.

At the heart of the design are a series of voids that connect the different components of the office. These voids create dramatic volumes within the space and reinstate a sense of grandeur that was lost over time. Of all the interventions, the glistening glass dome with its prominent corner aspect is by far the most impressive. *"The new dome, highly crafted using technologies and possibilities of a new generation, offers an exciting and eccentric layer to the skyline whilst celebrating the rich history of decorative rooftop architecture in Brixton,"* Squire says. The dome was crafted in collaboration with specialist manufacturer **Tuchschmid** and was intended to resonate with the characteristics of surrounding copper domes.







There are bespoke elements littered throughout The Department Store with designers relishing being part of such an interesting regenerative project. There are handmade rugs with Eley Kishimoto prints, limited edition **copper** lighting fixtures from **Louis Poulsen** and Danish furniture from **Carl Hansen**. Literally every space is out of control beautiful – take for example the brass-trimmed bathrooms or the magnificent entry with a reception desk that could be mistaken for a luxe haberdashery display. This is what workplace dreams are made of, folks!

Squire and Partners are cognisant of the fact that their move to the culturally diverse area of Brixton would be seen as bringing on the dreaded G-word….yep, you know guessed it: Gentrification. With that in mind, they sought to embed The Department Store in the local neighbourhood from the get-go. Their model shop at street level gives locals glimpses into their creative processes while local enterprises have been invited to lease tenancies to activate the street. As a standalone development, The Department Store is an incredible feat to be applauded; however its integration within the community will be the most significant indicator of success.

I don't know about you but we've got a serious case of office-envy, so it's a standing ovation from us.

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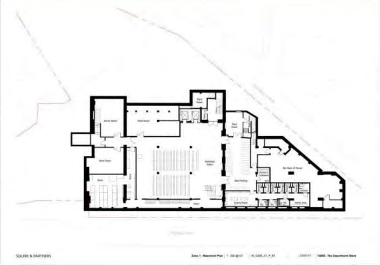
THE DEPARTMENT STORE 248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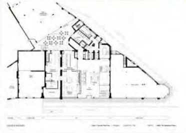

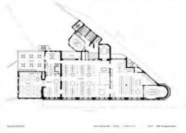

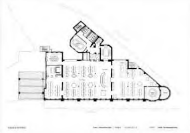

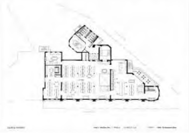

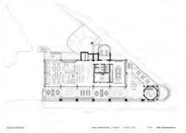

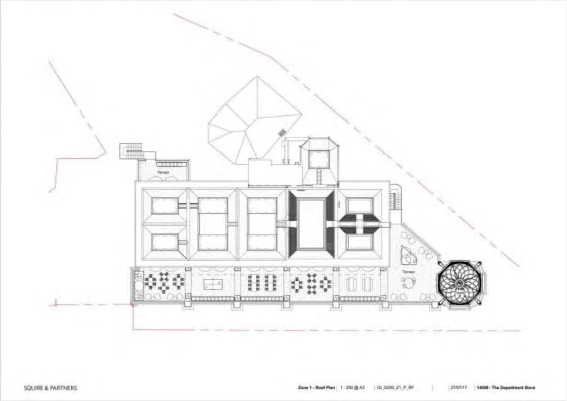
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[Images courtesy of **Squire and Partners**. Photography by **James Jones**.]

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

FENINA ACANCE → CONTRIBUTOR

Architecting away in Melbourne, Fenina is a shameless fashion, art and design fanatic who loves defying the relentless Melbournian uniform of black on black on black. Often spotted strutting a boisterous mix of pattern and colour, her eclectic love for the bold, raw and textured fuels her passion for design and contemporary art. When not indulging in Cy Twombly's sensitive scribbles or Serra's evocative sculptural forms, her love for everything Italian consumes the rest of her time. Whether it's the language, design or food (especially food), Fenina is obsessed!

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Elizabeth Schiavello

October 25, 2017

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